



## SENATE DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

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### **DEMOCRATS, TRIBAL LEADERS UNVEIL NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

*The Document Will Guide Democrats' Work on Behalf of Indian Country*

**WASHINGTON, DC-** Today tribal leaders from across the nation joined Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, Senator Byron Dorgan, Ranking Member of the Indian Affairs Committee, Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee Chair Hillary Clinton, and Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) to unveil the 2005 Indian Country Policy Recommendations for the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. The policy recommendations focus on five major priorities: 1) Trust Reform, Land and Natural Resources, 2) Health Care, 3) Education, 4) Housing, Infrastructure and Economic Development, and 5) Justice, Law Enforcement and Homeland Security.

“The recommendations contained in this document will serve as a blueprint to steer our work on behalf of Indian Country,” said Senator Reid. “Nobody knows the challenges that Indian tribes face better than you do. Your input and guidance will ensure that we can create the programs and develop legislation that best reflects the needs of Indian Country.”

“I am proud of the work that we have been doing in the Indian Affairs Committee in this Congress and I am extremely grateful for all the time and effort that the people in this room have invested in producing this document,” said Senator Dorgan. “We initiated this collaborative effort so that we could hear directly from Indian Country about the issues of greatest concern and how Congress can better address them.”

Last fall Senate Democrats convened over 150 tribal leaders for the first ever Senate Democratic Native American Forum. The policy discussions held at the Forum established five working groups comprised of tribal leaders and advocates. The recommendations unveiled today are the result of months of collaborative work by many leaders across Indian Country.

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For over a century, the United States has acted as trustee of the lands, resources and funds held in trust for Indian tribes, and for individual Indians. The U.S. has organized and administered the trust assets poorly. The recommendations include requiring the Administration to consult with tribes on all decisions impacting their land and natural resources, including use and disposition of tribal and individual Indian water rights.

While the federal government has committed to provide health care to Native Americans, it is failing to fulfill his obligation. The document recommends increasing funding for the Indian Health Service to the level necessary to meet the federal government's responsibility to provide quality health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN).

When it comes to education, culturally relevant programs and adequate yearly progress are particular areas of concern. Among other things, the recommendations call for amending the No Child Left Behind Act to address problems specific and unique to Indian Country, including the incorporation of culturally based education strategies.

To address the significant need of adequate housing in Indian Country, the tribal leaders recommended that the Senate supports efforts to increase housing funding to AIAN, enact legislation that improves the federal housing programs and support the policy of self determination. In addition, the Senate should ensure that the Department of Housing and Urban Development appropriately implements its Tribal Consultation Policy.

Among the recommendations for justice, law enforcement and homeland security, the tribal leaders called for Congress to provide funding to support a sufficient number of tribal police officers in Native American communities, ensure personnel are provided with adequate equipment for safety and communication, and ensure law enforcement officials have access to important information, such as criminal databases.

*To obtain a copy of the complete recommendations, please contact the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee at (202) 224-9048.*

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